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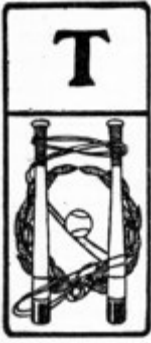
# How Shanky Saved the Day

The Story of a Strange Boy and a Ball Game

L. M. Montgomery

Illustration by Buckton Nendick

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ed,” said Aunt Lucretia, “I want you to go back to the swamp and get me some calamus root.”

Ted glanced at the clock with a calmness born of despair. He had been doing things for Aunt Lucretia all day—at least, ever since ten o’clock that morning, when his father and mother and Edgar had gone to town, leaving Ted and Aunt Lucretia to keep house.

Aunt Lucretia was a rather fussy old lady of sixty and Ted was a favorite with her because he always ran her many errands without grumbling. But even Ted felt that his patience had reached its limit.

“There is plenty of dried calamus root in the garret, Aunt Lucretia,” he protested. “It’s one o’clock now and the match is on at two-thirty. Our nine want to have a practice before it begins. Goodness knows we need it bad enough.”

Ted groaned dramatically but Aunt Lucretia was unimpressed.

“That calamus root is dry,” she complained. “I want it fresh. I think you might go for it, Ted; I sat up with you five whole nights last fall when you had the measles.”

That clinched the argument. Ted put on his cap and departed for the swamp with his spade over his shoulder and a reflective scowl on his brow—not because of having to go for the calamus root but because of the dark outlook of things generally. It really didn’t matter a great deal about the baseball practice. The Big Rock nine were bound to lose. All the practice in the world couldn’t make Bob Baxter’s broken leg sound and well by two-thirty that afternoon and without Bob Baxter they could never hope to beat the Milldale nine. Ted felt gloomily that the life of a schoolboy belonging to a nine that had got beaten in three matches running and was going to be beaten in a fourth was not worth living.

The swamp was at the rear end of the farm. Ted dug up calamus root with vicious energy. The boys would be practicing by now and wondering why he had not come. The captain would be down on him. Aunt Lucretia always had some whim or other and——

“What are you looking for, sonny? Hidden treasure?”

Ted swung around and saw a queer, undersized sort of boy sitting on the fence behind him. He had long wiry arms crossed over his breast, bright red hair and green eyes. Ted was sure he had never seen him before, yet there was something oddly familiar about him. He was about the size of thirteen with the face of thirty.

“I’m digging for calamus root,” Ted said shortly. He felt that something was going to give way in his temper very soon. This mysterious youngster looked as if he were making game of him. Where on earth had he come from anyway?

“Can I help you dig?” inquired the red-headed one gravely. “If it’s an all-day job

I might spell you.”

“I’m done,” said Ted more shortly still, picking up his basket.



“CAN I HELP YOU DIG?”

“Then sit up here on the fence and talk to me,” said the other boy plaintively. “I feel lost and lonesome. *Do* be sociable, sonny.”

Ted didn’t know whether to laugh or get mad. He concluded to laugh.

"I'm sorry I can't," he said. "I'm overdue now at a baseball practice and we have a match with the Milldale nine this afternoon."

"That sounds interesting," said the stranger. "Baseball—I'm rather fond of baseball myself. Tell me about this match. What about your nine? Are you going to win?"

"No, we're going to get beaten until we're sick," retorted Ted. "Oh, we're well used to it. Our nine is the Big Rock nine. We've never won a match in our lives. The Milldale boys have beaten us in three games. Most times we made them work for it, though. But it'll be a walkover for them today."

"How is that?"

"Bob Baxter broke his leg day before yesterday. He was our pitcher and a dandy one. I tell you his curves bothered folks. The Milldale boys were scared of him. Now he's out of it."

"Haven't you anyone to put in his place?"

"Only Morley Whitson. He's not much good and nobody likes him. He's not to be depended on and gets mad and sulks if he can't have his own way about everything. The captain wouldn't put him on if he could get anyone else."

"What about the Milldale nine?" inquired the stranger, leaning forward with a peculiar gleam in his queer green eyes. "Are they strong? Do they put up a good game?"

"Bully," said Ted laconically. "Besides, they're in luck just now. Jem Crafer's cousin from Quebec is staying with him this summer. He's playing on their nine in Will Howard's place. Will has got the whooping-cough—and him fifteen years old!"

Ted's voice expressed scorn and contempt for the unfortunate Milldalian who had not acquired whooping cough at a proper age.

"Do your nines let anybody play in their matches after that fashion?"

"Oh, yes. Our rules aren't very strict. It's an understood thing that any boy can be put in as a substitute.

"We wouldn't be able to play much if it wasn't, for some of the boys are always sure to be sick or away or picking potato bugs."

"Is this Quebec chap a good player?"

"Tip-top. His batting would make your eyes stick out. Gee! If we get licked again today the Big Rock nine will bust up. Nobody will believe that there ever was such a nine in existence."

The red-headed boy got down from the fence and drew a long breath.

"Come along, sonny. Big Rock is going to give a good account of itself yet. I'll go and pitch for you since your constitution is so elastic."

“Can you play baseball?” demanded Ted.

“A little,” said the other meekly.

“Well, you can’t be worse than Morley, anyhow,” said Ted reflectively. “I’ll see what the captain says. What’s your name?”

“In general I am called Shanky,” said the stranger.

“Haven’t you any other?” demanded Ted suspiciously.

“Oh, yes. Long—Long Shanky.”

Ted looked very hard at the stranger but that inscrutable face betrayed nothing.

“It’s a queer name,” he said doubtfully, “but if you can play baseball your name doesn’t matter. Let’s go.”

They went. Shanky talked and questioned and by the time they reached the Big Rock school grounds Ted had a somewhat uncomfortable feeling that he had been metaphorically turned inside out.

“He knows as much now about the Big Rock nine as I do,” he thought. “He can ask a pretty decent lot of questions and bluff you off when you ask him any. I haven’t even found out where he belongs; but I believe he’s a town boy.”

Nevertheless, Ted found himself liking his odd new acquaintance. He felt a mysterious confidence in him, too, despite his ignorance concerning him.

The captain, Oliver Bronson, looked Shanky over keenly and somewhat condescendingly.

“Have you played much?” he asked.

“Considerable,” drawled Shanky.

“Well,” said Oliver with a shrug, “it’s Hobson’s choice with us. We’ll have to take you on for Morley’s sulking already. Our chances are bluer than smoke. The Milldale nine are over there, as fit as fiddles, with that Quebec chap puffing himself out. He thinks he’s the whole nine. You’re something of a pitcher, Ted tells me.”

“Something,” agreed Shanky the laconic.

“Well, that is what we want since that ninny of a Bob had to go and smash his leg. You’ll find a rig-out in the school porch. I guess Bob’s sweater’ll do for you.”

Baseball matches between Milldale and Big Rock were always played at the Big Rock school grounds, the playground at Milldale being unsuitable. There were not many spectators of the match—the farming communities of Milldale and Big Rock did not take the school games very seriously. But all the boys of both schools were present to watch and criticise, cheer and hoot, and call advice to the players with a cheerful disregard of etiquette.

The Milldale nine had the first inning. The players on both sides took their places. The Quebec chap, a tall lad of sixteen whose name was Sidney Garland,

was at the bat with a rather superior smile on his face as if he meant to show these country kids a thing or two. Shanky stood with the ball in his hand. His thin wiry body was half lost in the folds of big Bob Baxter's sweater and his non-committal face was quite vacant of expression. Ted, watching him, felt blue. He was responsible for this substitute. What if he didn't do as well as Morley after all? Then the captain would be furious and Morley would be triumphant and—

Whiz! Shanky with a sudden light of battle in his eye, had bent forward and delivered a ball. Two seconds later the Quebec boy was out with a dazed look on his face.

That day and its doings are still green and fresh in the memories of the Big Rock nine. The Milldales have not forgotten it either but they do not speak of it, even among themselves. Their defeat was too complete and bitter. One after another they succumbed to Shanky's curves. When the Big Rocks went in Shanky did equally wonderful things with the bat. The other Big Rocks, inspired by the knowledge that they were doing well and thrilled with the spirit of contest as they had never been before, rose to the occasion and played their best. It was the most exciting game that had ever been played in Big Rock and when the time was up and the Big Rocks were the winners by a huge score such a yell of triumph went up that Farmer Reeves in his turnip field two miles away heard it and wondered whose chimney was on fire over at Big Rock.

Shanky was the hero of the day. The Big Rocks carried him on their shoulders around the grounds and fiercely envied Ted the privilege of walking home with him.

Ted felt at least three inches taller when he left the playground than he had done when he entered it. The Big Rocks had beaten the Milldales and he, Ted Gordon, had been the indirect means thereof, by reason of having discovered Shanky. He took the latter home and Aunt Lucretia, in great good humor over her fine supply of calamus root gave them a tip-top supper. She seemed to like Shanky who in spite of his odd appearance, certainly had the knack of winning confidence and favor. Aunt Lucretia told him all about her rheumatism and her dread of rats and Shanky detailed a remedy for the former and promised to send her a new kind of rat-trap which he had invented himself.

"If you can inveigle the rats into it," he assured her, "they can't get out of it. Well, I must be off. There's a train I want to catch."

"Say," said Ted, overmastered by his curiosity, "Is Shanky your real name? All the fellows will be asking me about you. What shall I tell them?"

Shanky grinned.

"Ask your brother Edgar who Shanky is," he said. "He'll tell you. Tell him I'll



come again. Sorry to have missed him today but glad I was in time to help you wipe up those Milldales becomingly.”

When Edgar came home he listened to Ted’s story in silence; then he gave a whistle and a shout of laughter.

“If that isn’t like Shanky!” he said. “He’s always doing odd things. Pitched for you, did he? Well, you’ve heard me speak of Longworth Stanton I suppose?”

Longworth Stanton! Edgar’s chum at the Rockywold High School, the son of the richest man in the province, that star player of the Rockywold nine whose pitching was something that would carry him into the University team the next year!

“You don’t mean to say that Shanky is Longworth Stanton!” gasped Ted, overcome. “Why—why—I asked him if he could play baseball!”

“He’ll forgive you for the joke of it,” grinned Edgar. “I’m sorry I wasn’t home. It was like him to come unannounced by cross-cuts through swamps. Your little baby game with the Milldales would delight him. Don’t look so downcast, bub. You’re a decent little chap if you are my brother and Shanky won’t mind your patronizing him.”

“Anyhow, I wasn’t any worse than Oliver,” said Ted stoutly. “He asked him if he understood anything about pitching! Hold on till I tell him! And wasn’t it precious lucky that I went for that calamus root?”

## TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

[The end of *How Shanky Saved the Day: The Story of a Strange Boy and a Ball Game* by L. M. (Lucy Maud) Montgomery]